



# A Psychoanalytic Study of Kamala Markandaya's Females in 'Possession'

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**Abstract**— *Kamala Markandaya is a world renowned author of English on the Indian landscape. Her works are famous for the true representation of the plight of Indian women who; caught into the web of patriarchy, are so utterly subdued and crushed that their voice of resistance go unheard and unnoticed. Extensive study of her works reveals the impression of her strong hold over the human mind as she has studied them quite closely and minutely. In fact she can easily penetrate into the hidden recesses of one's thoughts and bring out the unthought-of and unpredicted-of. She is a prominent Indian English novelist who has strongly stood with women's sexuality and her right to body in a most unconventional and subversive manner. She displays a highly developed consciousness of the gendered nature of morality and social structure. She is among the clutch of those few Indian female authors who have dared to portray the plight of Indian women suffering from prejudice in a dominantly patriarchal society and envisions a world based on equality and harmony between the two sexes. She examines the sufferings and problems of the women who feel entrapped within the bond of relationship, whether married or single; with keen sensibility and perception. Her novel 'Possession' deals with different shades of human psyche, especially the females. It's reading gives the experience of therapeutic journey wherein the mind of the characters unfold slowly as the curtain raises on the main character, Valmiki. He is the most significant and pivotal character of the novel around which the other characters revolve revealing a plethora of mixed desires and characters. The inter play of emotions is the beauty of the novel which carries the readers on a roller coaster ride. The present paper is an attempt to unravel the text 'Possession' by groping deep into its depths and analysing it through the vision of a psychoanalyst.*

**Keywords**— *Patriarchy, resistance, sexuality, entrapped, therapeutic.*

Kamala Markandaya's identity is not unknown to the readers of English literature. On its canvas she is portrayed as a world acclaimed Indian writer who occupies a distinguished and much acclaimed position amongst the post-Independence Indo Anglican novelists. Extensive study of her works reveals the impression of her strong hold over the human mind as she has studied them closely and acutely. In fact she can easily penetrate into the hidden recesses of one's thoughts and bring out the unthought-of and the unpredicted-of. She is a prominent Indian English novelist who has strongly stood with the women's sexuality and her right to body in an unconventional and subversive manner. She displays a highly developed

consciousness of the gendered nature of morality and social structure. She is among the clutch of those few female Indian authors who have dared to portray the plight of women suffering from prejudice in a dominantly patriarchal society and envisions a world based on equality and harmony between the two sexes. She examines the sufferings and problems of the women who feel entrapped within the bond of relationship, whether married or single; with keen sensibility and perception. Here, I would like quote the words of Stephen Ignatius Hemingway, 'She is definitely one of the most productive, popular and skilled Indo-Anglican activist and a super representative of the growing number of Indian women writing serious

*literature in English*' (The Novels of India, p.52). This article is an honest attempt to unravel the text '*Possession*' by groping deep into its depths and analysing it through the vision of a psychoanalyst. The focus here are the women who shape and reshape the life of the protagonist and the style in which the author has striven to sketch them on the broad canvas of her novel using varied hues.

Dictionary defines '*psychoanalysis*' as a set of psychological theories and therapeutic techniques that have their origin in the works and theories of Sigmund Freud. The core of this theory is that all people possess unconscious thoughts, feelings, desires and memories. Sigmund Freud; the Australian neurologist's contribution to the study of the unconscious is the application of the scientific methods of probing into the dark and unknown recesses of the mind which is one of the innumerable critical approaches to any genre of literature. The unconscious mind is defined as a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges and memories. Freud believed that the unconscious continues to influence behaviour even though people are unaware of these underlying influences. When conceptualising the unconscious mind, it can be helpful to compare the mind to an iceberg. Everything above the water represents conscious awareness while everything below represents the unconscious. Psychoanalysis became popular and came into being as a consequence of Romantic Literature of the nineteenth century. This literature was passionately devoted to probing into the working of the mind of an individual. It is also concerned with the instincts of man and the working of sexuality in his social interactions. In this context the great historian David Daiches has said, '*The behaviour of characters in a novel can be studied in the light of modern psychological knowledge and, if their behaviour confirms what we know about the subtleties of the human mind, we can use modern theories as a means of elucidating and interpreting the work*' (Critical Approaches to Literature, p.337).

Kamala Markandaya's novel '*Possession*' dominantly presents the complexities of human relationships and the East-West encounter as well, along with the theme of politics. East- West encounter has played a vital role in presenting the psychological conflicts in the novel. The novelist has remarkably and very effectively shown the transformation and development of tribal psyche into western through the central character Valmiki. It is a novel that deals mainly with a boy of extraordinary genius in painting. He is discovered in a remote village by a British Lady Caroline Bell who is well informed about art. Charmed by his caliber and deep knowledge of fine art, she decides to export him to her native country England and inculcate in him the life of western tradition. Though she succeeds in her plan and is able to device the

exceptional talent in him; yet she doesn't realize that Valmiki cannot easily slip into the spirit of western art which is based on entirely different cultural and spiritual traditions. He is a staunch devotee of Swami and his interest in painting and his faith in Swami are an integral part of his cultural life. He is so deeply addicted to his art that he can die for it rather than ditch.

Caroline Bell represents a typically capitalistic woman who believes in exploiting the financially deprived. She discovers the talent of painting in Valmiki and tries to possess the poor Indian village boy. She is a specimen of the rich-westernized society which thrives on the talent and potential of the poor. The lady tactfully and effortlessly procures him under an agreement from his parents and carries him to her native country England to make him not only a source of her personal financial gain but also to use him for satisfying her sexual lust. It is, unfortunately, the insatiable thirst for money that compels Valmiki's father to overlook his relations with his son and bargain him. Valmiki's mother is aware of her husband's disposition but being a traditional Hindu wife she is unable to muster the courage to defy his orders. Her condition is similar to Kunti in '*Nectar in a Sieve*'; who despite knowing the illicit relation of her husband forgives him and compromises for the sake of her children. Val's mother too seldom raised voice against his father's commands, even if it was her son's life. She just says: '*He has already decided. Did you not hear him? It was the money- it was too much for him. But it is always so, men are ever free and easy with that for which they have neither suffered nor laboured*' (Possession, Kamala..., p.20).

Caroline has her shrewd way. Bulldozing the hesitations of Valmiki's family; she manages to take him to England. Valmiki's life experiences drastic change the very moment he is sold to Caroline Bell. Now he is compelled to change his thinking as well as his psyche in order to acquire the new culture he has stepped in. He is put to school to learn painting. Initially, unknown to Caroline's shrewd and malice ways, he performs well but slowly begins to lose faith in her prescription and consequently his energy begins to flog. The novelist has clearly depicted how the western culture has the tendency to exploit, physically as well as psychologically, the innocent and the poor for selfish gains. Ever since the artist is transplanted in the west, he passes through a period of acute emotional excitement, depression and conflict. After a lot of struggle, he finally makes his way back to his native culture where he develops the equanimity and independence of fame and sensuality. Valmiki's return to India and his refusal to go with Caroline Bell symbolizes the psychological surge of India's independence and consequent freedom from the

British rule. Here, through the act of smuggling of Valmiki for financial and physical benefits, the author has tried to showcase negative trait of women. Caroline is presented as a vamp who vainlessly tries to allure Valmiki to a life he detested and ultimately flees. Her sole motive is sexual gratification and monetary extraction. By smuggling him she partially succeeds in her endeavour.

Valmiki breaks away from her and returns to India to his village in the lap of mountains and settles down to a career according to his choice with the blessings of Swamiji whom he worships and considers his guru. Swami too has a pivotal importance in the plot and embodies the best in the tradition of Sainthood. Valmiki, the artist, is a painter by inspiration and not by instruction. Such is the impact of swami on him that he transforms not only into an artist but also a good human being. Thus, swami plays the role of a surrogate father to him by inculcating in him the understanding of artistic culture, basic attitudes and values. Kamala Markandaya portrays both, the master and his disciple, as being soaked in the fervor of Indian Ethos. To them, art is sacred and is godly dedicated to the service of the divine spirit. When Valmiki outgrows his boyhood and becomes an adolescent, he comes into the contact of the outside world from which he had been aloof and unknown so far. This exposes him to a plethora of shocks, as the nakedness of world is too difficult to endure. Kamala Markandaya uses the spiritual ideals of asceticism and then tactfully implicates them as great presences in the personal lives of people, thus transforming them into shockproof beings.

When Valmiki's guru comes to know about his bargain by a shrewd woman, he visits him in England and revives in him, in his unobtrusive way, the values that he stands for and the differences between his new adapted values and the original ones. It is then that Valmiki realizes how extremely he has been duped and cheated. He decides on saving his art and his inner integrity and once that decision is taken, he behaves with a singularity of purpose. The Indian ethos firmly believes in the guru and his teachings, he is an incarnation of God for the disciple. After Swami's arrival Caroline is surely disturbed and knows that spiritualism would prove a great threat to her plan of physical and materialistic possession. She wants to control Valmiki wholly which is why she wants to send Swami back to India. From the very beginning she is aware of the fact that Valmiki is deeply influenced by Swami. She is longing to possess the boy and in order to do so she seduces him into an almost incestuous relationship despite the wide difference between their ages. But despite all her efforts, she fails to own him. The spiritual teachings of swami prove stronger than the cravings for physical lust and Valmiki comes out clean from the web that tightly

closed on him. His freedom from her claws is synonymous to India's liberation from the British rule, a renewed life devoid of entanglements.

In the novel Kamala Markandaya has chosen Anasuya, a female, as the spokes person of the story. As the name suggests, she is a lady free from envy and jealousy and thus, quite suitable for the task. She is Caroline's friend and an eye witness to her relation with Valmiki. Since she is an Indian, therefore, the story is told mainly from the Indian point of view. She not only narrates the story from a particular angle but also delineates it as a reporter. She is quite an enigmatic character and it is difficult to fathom her. She is the bridge between the two worlds of Kamala Markandaya, the East and the West. She tells the story of Valmiki's life and like Mirabai of '*Some Inner Fury*' passes some instances of languages that are to be exemplified for its simplicity. The gradual progression in Valmiki for the language learning procedure shows the translating method of Markandaya and also reflects the artificiality imposed by the characters and presents their actual psychological development. Giving his view on the role of Anasuya; Iyenger comments, '*Perhaps Anasuya (or Kamala Markandaya) is trying to make the story of Caroline and Valmiki something of a parable of colonialism, the passing of one empire, and the current insidious movement of new-colonialism*' (Indian Writing in English, p. 211).

Being an Indian, Anasuya is well known to its tradition and culture. When Caroline, on discovering the artistic excellence of Valmiki, wants to take him with her to England Anasuya advises and cautions her not to indulge into it as he has a family and the responsibilities adhered to it. And it is most likely that he may not want to leave them and his family may not permit either. In this way Anasuya not only candidly denies helping her but also showcases her concern for Valmiki. She is well accustomed to the psyche of the Indian family but Caroline is too stubborn to step back. She wants her prey at any cost. Anasuya is aware of Caroline's negative instinct. It seems as if she can read her heart and mind well. She analyses both, Caroline's anxiety and psychological perplexity for Valmiki and Valmiki's attachment with Swami. Here, we comprehend Markandaya's innovative and inventive skill while employing common feelings of human emotions and passions because they are directly connected with the human psyche. Anasuya is a product of two cultural modes, the East and the West. On one hand we see her eagerness about search for identity and on the other side we find her encountering the conscious and unconscious motives of her friend, Caroline. Anasuya describes Caroline's psyche in Freudian's words; that she was supremely confident and born and brought up to do so, as

a missionary in the full armour of his mission, dogged by none of the hesitations.

Ellie is another beautiful character in the novel portrayed by Markandaya. She is a twenty years old Jewish girl who has suffered the cruelty of Nazis in the camp. She is raped there almost every night and is described as a victim of European crime in European confines. Caroline reckons her better than nothing. She is an orphan who is rendered hopeless, helpless and desperate. The emotional aspects related to her are so violent that they shake the inner fibres of human psyche and reveal the emotional intensity. Anasuya deeply impressed by Ellie finds that it is not she but Ellie who dominates her. Pale, ineffectual, asleep or more probably awake in her room, surrounded by Valmiki's work, and carrying his seed in her womb; she lived the life of exile without complaining to anyone about her plight. She tells Anasuya about her mental condition and her deep love for Valmiki, *'I lie with a man-so I do not talk about love, because I do not know if that is what I feel. It is not easy to feel because I am burnt out, inside. But Valmiki loves me. He does not know it, but he does. At times like tonight he forgets he cannot understand himself how it is possible to love someone so dull as I am, you can see in his face he is asking this question. Then, when the others are gone and it is day time again, he comes back to me. We are of one kind'* (Kamala, Possession, p.104).

In Ellie Valmiki finds a young woman battered in body and soul during the Second World War. She is physically and mentally so brutally maimed and deeply bruised that she loses her fertility. Markandaya has, through the novel, not only discovered and portrayed the Feminine psyche of the ordinary world but also the substandard bordering of abnormal women. She has expertly given a complex portrayal of Ellie's mounting agony, which makes the novel a remarkable psychological study of female neurotic fears. Here we are reminded of Ira in *'Nectar in a Sieve'* who is unable to answer to her child's queries regarding his father as he is illegally begotten. In spite of her frustration; Ellie carries the seed of Valmiki in her womb. She feels for the child and confesses that if it wouldn't have been for it she wouldn't have conceived it. There is no relationship more pious in the world than that of a mother and her child. Freud says, *'Experience shows that woman who, as being the actual vehicle of sexual interest of mankind, are only endowed in a small measure, with the gift of sublimating their instincts, . . . when they are subjected to disillusionments of sexual life, fall ill of severe neurosis which permanently darken their lives'* (Civilized Sexual Morality...). The sense of security and the warmth of sympathy from Valmiki; heals her wounds and revives the woman in her. He, overwhelmed by her suffering and torments, falls for her. Caroline is hatefully jealous of Ellie

and expels her because she cannot bear Valmiki's relationship with another woman. She even informs Annabel about Valmiki's illicit relationship with Ellie. This shows the neurotic anxiety of possessiveness in Caroline who wants to achieve him by any means. Valmiki is a way to harvest easy success in the society. She has gained recognition in higher guild with the help of his art and now wishes to maintain the influence and thus; strives to acquire him as her lover. This behaviour of Caroline showcases her superiority complex and in order to satisfy her maligned psyche she plays all kinds of tricks to drag his attention away from Ellie.

Valmiki is shocked when he comes to know about the forged letter and also Caroline's selfish motives. He realizes that it is Caroline who is responsible for turning him out of the house as she couldn't stand his relationship with Ellie. Caroline is so extremely jealous that not only Ellie but she is also completely against the amiable relationship brewing between Valmiki and Annabel. She strives hard to separate them by creating such adverse circumstances that Annabel ultimately breaks up all relations with him. Here Annabel represents the typical English girl of the fifties though she is just eighteen; small, slim, ordinary looking with bright-brown eyes; brownish gold hair cut in ragged urchin style, the short spiky ends appearing all over her head. She is against her family's will and turns down their plans for getting her married. Though she is a liberated soul, she looks at her romantic world through the eyes of Caroline who cunningly directs her towards what she desires. When the true colour of Caroline is revealed, he immediately leaves England. Caroline follows him in a bid to retrieve but Valmiki denies as he does not want to fall prey to her again. He lands safe and protected in the lap of his motherland from where he doesn't wish to go anywhere else. Finally, liberated from her grip; he hopes to lead a serene life.

The novel carries in its fold four women, all of different shades and contours. These are Caroline, Ellie, Anasuya and Annabel. Valmiki is linked to all of them in one way or the other. He has more affinity with Caroline but later the realization dawns on him that he actually doesn't know her. He is comfortable with Anasuya as she is from his native motherland. She also cares for him and tries to shield and protect him from falling into Caroline's trap. Ellie is a typical woman who silently suffers at the hands of cruel men and seldom complains. She is the lady whom Valmiki loves and cares for. She also reciprocates positively and carries his seed in her womb. Annabel is a bubbly and spirited girl of eighteen who loves to live life according to her desire. Though liberated in thought, she is deeply influenced by Caroline who has full command over her actions. The psychological study of Markandaya's

'Possession' reveals that the women generally reflect a sense of isolation, fear, bewilderment, emotional vulnerability and possessiveness as a symbol not only of growth, life and fertility but also of withdrawal, regression, suppression, neurotic anxiety, decay and death. Kamala Markandaya is aware of the fact that all the sweet ties of home and family depend upon sex. But in this novel she has presented the dark side of it. It is obvious that it is she who has initiated the lead of woman's transformation from possession to personal self through her novel. The trajectory of novel is like a seesaw, wherein the reader is at times positioned on the top and most of the time at the bottom, groping for the hidden treasures that it holds.

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